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The Pedagogy of Experience and drama intelligence.

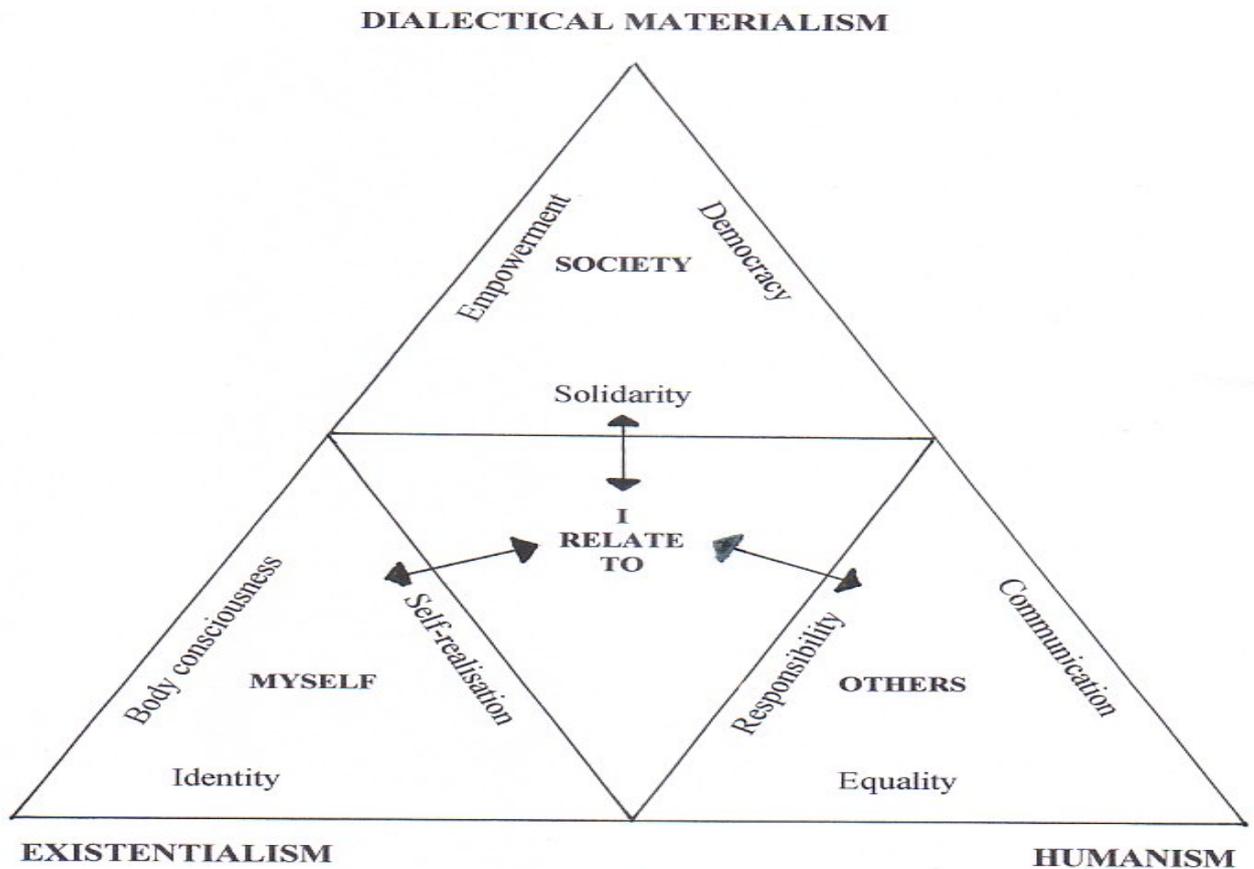
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The Pedagogy of Experience

This paper is a retrospective view of a unique Nordic innovation in drama and education created by drama and theatre educationists and artists from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden in the early seventies. *The Pedagogy of Experience* (figure 1), informed by the philosophies of existentialism, humanism and dialectical materialism, was developed in the eighties and nineties on projects in Nordic educational and cultural institutions.

Figure 1: The Pedagogy of Experience



The concept and some of the theory and practice was first presented in *Experiment with The Pedagogy of Experience, Constructive Group Communication and Collective Artistic Creativity* (Eksperiment med Upplevelsens Pedagogik, Konstruktiv Gruppsamvaro och Kollektivt Skapande), a report published in 1975 based on a collective empirical research project at the Nordic Peoples High School in Kungälv, Sweden in 1972-73 led by Inspector in General Adult Education, Svend Møller Nicolaisen, from the Danish Ministry of Education, Children's Theatre Consultant and Drama Educator Inger Johnsson, Sweden and myself.

The theory, based on experiences created, developed and reflected on during the original project, the follow up project and my own experiences and reflection on the processes and the outcomes through the years, begs to be documented in some form. This paper is both the continuation and the beginning of a research process that aims to draw attention to and acknowledge the work of Danish educationist Svend Møller Nicolaisen and others who created and developed *The Pedagogy of Experience*.

Inger Johnsson died of cancer in 1986. Svend Møller Nicolaisen died in a motor accident in 1988. I am the last surviving member of the leader-team who created *The Pedagogy of Experience* in collaboration with 5 Danes, 4 Fins, 7 Norwegians and 10 Swedes in 1972-73 and on the follow-up NARDRAM project from 1974 to 1985.

Svend Møller Nicolaisen or Nic, as friends and colleagues called him, was the theoretician, educational philosopher and driving force behind this Nordic experiment. He had several articles published in journals and periodicals from the mid sixties until his death and contributed extensively to the 1975 Kungälv report and later to a book entitled: *A better life* (Et bedre liv) published in 1979. Since *A better life* very little has been published with reference to *The Pedagogy of Experience*..

Two Norwegian researchers at Trondheim University, Nils Braanaas and Runo Hellvin, wrote about this Nordic cultural-educational experiment in the mid eighties.¹ In 1996. Anita Grünbaum , one of

¹ Braanaas, Nils (1985) *Dramapedagogisk Historie og Teori*, (Trondheim, Tapir),
Hellvin, Runo (1984), *Amatørteater i Norden*, IDFT, (University in Trondheim)

the Swedish participants and former head of Dramapedagogue Education at Västerbergs Folk High School in Sweden compiled a compendium based on dialogues with Nic and his writings.²

The empirical research project at the Nordic Peoples High School in Kungälv for leaders of general adult education in drama and theatre gave Nic the opportunity of testing and developing his theory and philosophy in practice. The participating group of 30 drama and theatre educationists and artists were not only from four different national cultures but also represented a wide range of life experiences and knowledge of cultural practices, drama, theatre and educational practices. During four intensive residential course weeks over a period of one year, the leader-team and the course participants continuously experienced and reflected continuously on various interactive creative processes and the outcomes.

The methodology of *The Pedagogy of Experience* demands an awareness of context and an equal balance of both individual and group creativity in collective art-making processes, drama processes and other cultural and educational processes.

Some of the philosophers, psychologists, educationists and drama educators that inspired our collective and individual reflection during the main project were amongst others Socrates, Grundtvig, Karl Marx, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Eric Berne, Eric From, Ronald D. Laing, Abraham Maslow, Finn Rasborg, Carl Rogers, Arne Sjølund, Peter Slade, Harald Swedner and Brian Way.

Especially the writings of John Dewey (*Experience and Education, Art and Experience*), Paulo Freire (*The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), Ronald D. Laing (*The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*), Abraham Maslow (*Towards a Psychology of Being*) and Brian Way (*Development through Drama*) were useful theories to reflect on and with, in our experiential and experimental research practices both fictional and real.

It feels paradoxical to explain what *The Pedagogy of Experience* is, in words alone. To be understood fully it has to be experienced. Ronald D. Laing provided us with the following credo:

² Grünbaum, Anita (1996) *Drama = Upplevelsens Pedagogik – Samtal med Nic* (Compendium - unpublished)

Even facts become fictions, without adequate ways of seeing 'the facts'. We do not need theories so much as the experience that is the source of the theory. We are not satisfied with faith, in the sense of an implausible hypothesis irrationally held: we demand to experience the 'evidence'.

(1967: p.15)

The leader-team and the participants were convinced through personal experience and reflection that *learning by doing* was the way to learn and authentically understand. Brian Way wrote that “a basic definition of drama might be simply ‘to practise living.’”(1967: p.6), even more important however were Peter Slade’s statements in *Child Drama* that “drama means ‘doing’ and ‘struggling’.”..... ‘It is the Art of living’.” (1954: p.25)

One of the aims of *The Pedagogy of Experience* was an awareness of suppression through experience in drama processes (experience in the fictional world) and life processes (experience in the real world) when reflecting on the drama experience – the drama processes. Not only society’s suppression of the individual was part of the content of the project but also how the individual suppresses herself and how everyday relationships to others can suppress the individual

The philosophy of *The Pedagogy of Experience* looks upon the individual as free and able to think independently. The aim was to support the idea of and help develop autonomous individuals who believe in themselves, their own thoughts, feelings and judgements. Individuals who make independent choices and act consciously and responsibly in the social contexts they are part of and enter into. The aesthetic education and development of autonomous individuals capable of interacting constructively and creatively in different social contexts are central aims of the pedagogy.

The methodology is guided by the model above (figure 1) which is both a didactical and an analytical tool. Drama and education is about interaction and relationships in both the fictional and real world. *The Pedagogy of Experience* works with the dialectical interaction and relationship between these two worlds and the methodology has three dimensions:

- collective fictional drama processes: exercises, improvisations, role-playing, art-making etc,
- collective reflective processes after the drama processes

- individual inner dialogues and reflective processes which receive nutrition and become animated by the dialogues in the two other processes.

Individuals experience when in interaction with others. The individual's educative processes come about in interactive dialogues with others in the fictional and real experiences.

One of Nic's recurring provocative statements was "No one can teach anyone anything"

The individual learns when he or she actively expresses himself or herself about experiences using different forms of symbolic reflexive and reflective languages.

Drama and education – practicing research & researching practice

While working on developing the theory and practice of *the Pedagogy of Experience* I came across the concept *the Intelligence of Feeling*, the theory of *Subject-reflexive Action* and the research of two Englishmen from Exeter University, lecturer in Arts Education Malcolm Ross and sociologist Dr. Robert Witkin. (Witkin, 1974 & Ross, 1975, 1978). The encounter inspired me to work on creating and developing a holistic individual-centred drama methodology based on the view that drama and theatre, education and art, the individual and the collective are fruitful dialectical partners and not antagonistic contradictory elements in art-making processes.

My pressing question through many years of practical investigation, reflexion³ and reflection was and still is:

How can the theories, philosophies and practices of *the Pedagogy of Experience* and *the Intelligence of Feeling* work together to create a drama education and education practice based on a synthesis of thought and action relevant for the individual, the group and society today and in the future?

I have been striving to find out what kind of methodology, combination of activities and strategies, could provide people with deeper self-knowledge, more insight into drama and theatre processes and which also produces satisfying creative artworks. In accordance with one of the central principles of *The Pedagogy of Experience*, these practical research processes were evaluated and reflected on continually. This inductive research approach led naturally to looking for, combining theories and creating concepts that would support and help articulate the insights revealed in

³ Reflexion – intuitive non rational thinking in images and with feelings.

practice. The evaluations, new insights and knowledge served to develop and improve the methodology. I researched the practical research of the methodology more theoretically when writing my thesis *A Work of Hearts*⁴ at the University in Trondheim in the late nineties. During that period I visited Malcolm Ross to interview him about *the Intelligence of Feeling, the Aesthetic Impulse* and his latest research work and to seek some advice about my own research and thesis ideas. During the interview and our subsequent talk Malcolm said the following:

*I've never heard or seen Witkin's theory applied to drama in quite this way before. The field of Drama-in-Education hasn't really addressed the model of the creative process as conceived in the way The Intelligence of Feeling conceives of that process. One might ask, what is the intelligence of drama?*⁵

Malcolm's challenging question sparked off others which I investigated and made an attempt to answer in my thesis which I chose to research in a semi-dramatic form. The representation of the methodology in the art form of a play made it possible for me to condense knowledge accumulated during more than thirty years of practical experience and investigation in drama, theatre and education into one hypothetical example. The play, *Six Characters Researching a Method*,⁶ is the axis around which the whole study revolves - a synthesis of experience and thought.

Drama intelligence

I make no claim to a well-founded definition of *drama intelligence* but consider that my thesis mapped out part of the field. It demonstrates, looks behind and delves into various aspects of drama intelligence.

Drama intelligence is an amalgam of intelligences. Important components in the broader picture are pretend playing (drama), Howard Gardner's intrapersonal intelligence – '*access to one's own feeling life*', interpersonal intelligence - '*the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals and in particular, among moods, temperaments, motivations and intentions*' and existential intelligence – '*the intelligence of big questions*', (Gardner, 1983 & Guss, 2001).

⁴*A Work of Hearts – a way of teaching, working and thinking drama and theatre*, M. Phil. thesis, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Department of Art and Media Studies, Drama and Theatre Division, Trondheim, Norway, May 1999.

⁵ Interview with Malcolm Ross, Reader in Education, the University of Education, England, September 1998.

⁶ The title of the play in *A Work of Hearts*, inspired by Luigi Pirandello's world famous drama *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921)

Drama intelligence is a feeling intelligence developed in processes of self exploration, self-transformation and meaning making through individual creative imaginative action and cultural-aesthetic practice in a collective context. It is an intelligence all human beings have the capacity to develop – an intelligence that is empathic, intuitive, spontaneous and imaginative. Its basis is man's 'theatrical instinct'. (Evreinoff, 1927) The ability to play personally is essential.

Through *personal play* (Slade, 1954, p. 29 & Slade, 1995, pp. 3-4) and the use of his imagination, man transforms himself and transcends into another reality. A reality where he can be different, do something different, be somewhere different than in everyday life and see things in a different perspective.

The development of drama intelligence can be achieved through the practice of playing, play acting and acting, of being characters real or symbolic created by the individual herself alone and in conjunction with others – through practising living. In drama, as in life, the individual is both the creator and the medium. The material to be transformed is herself. As an artist and a human being she is both the subject creating and the object created.

Playing is life. Playing at living contributes to the acquirement of self knowledge, knowledge of humankind in general and awareness of the creative power of the imagination. An awareness that provides insight, strength and the will to change reality. Through his imagination man has the capacity to transform 'the given circumstances' and be in 'a continual state of becoming'.

Life is not life if there is no moving and changing. Drama intelligence is about life and living. It is the individual's capacity to relate imaginatively, intuitively, empathetically and consciously to other human beings and oneself as a human being. Drama intelligence is man's ability to make symbolic universal meaning out of symbolic particular meaning and vice versa.

An individual-centred drama methodology

Luigi Pirandello wrote in one of his trilogy of plays about life and art *Life is, as it ought to be, in an infinitely various and continually changing state of becoming*. (1988: p.14)

Creating characters until they become fixed in a form is - "an infinitely various and continually changing state of becoming."

Characters created by participants in the holistic individual-centred drama methodology I have developed are in ‘a continual state of becoming’ throughout the drama and art-making processes. They can ‘continue to become’ through an extensive, intensive and rigorous process where each individual continually writes, re-writes, creates and develops his own script through thought and creative action.

My intention is always to encourage participants, students etc. to be spontaneous. I want them to trust their intuition and believe in their impulses while searching for the aesthetic impulse. They play in *the potential space* (Winnicott 1971: 41) where they are given the opportunity of attaining personal knowledge in the area of cultural experience between “me” and “not me”.

Winnicott’s concept of “me” and “not me” can be expanded to encompass “not, not me” if one thinks of actors creating their characters from a playwright’s text. A playwright’s text can be looked upon as “not me”. The “not, not me” is the actor's interpretation and expression of the text. By not always working with a complete dramatic text, the idea of “not me” and “not, not me” does not really exist in the same way in devising processes in the drama methodology in question. The “not, not me” is ‘the continual state of becoming’ – the process of fixing something, then creating something new, researching through feeling thoughts in creative imaginative action, fixing once more, then new creative imaginative action again and so on. Here the participants are both playwrights and actors in the devising of their dramas and their character-creating, meaning making processes. One could say they become engaged in identity projects.

Why we need an individual-centred drama methodology in the global society today.

It is my belief that individuals are more inclined to have an excess of energy and desire to work constructively with others, when they are conscious of choice and their own continual state of becoming. Self-knowledge and self-awareness cultivates the soil in which collective collaboration, democracy and solidarity can grow.

A process of personal investigation always reveals something old and new. The philosophy and methodology enables individuals to see themselves as both fixed and not fixed. It gives them the opportunity of discovering and trying out other possibilities and the freedom, power and confidence to perceive themselves, others and the world in a new way. A process of discovery and meaning

making that is anchored to their creation of a character and a drama and using both as a *transitional object*. (Winnicott, 1971, pp 1-25) The purpose is to give participants adequate time and space to work reflexively and the possibility of ‘losing themselves’ in the characters and the aesthetic experience in order to expand and deepen their self-knowledge, knowledge of human beings and the world through inner dialogues, *contemplation in solitude* and *reflexive conversation*⁷.

It is imperative that each participant in this drama methodology creates her own representational form that comes out of her level of knowledge and experience, the present everyday themes and other given circumstances in the specific context. The participants are responsible for their own production of knowledge. They produce and transform cultural knowledge, which is their own knowledge, expressed in aesthetic form. This implies a theory of knowledge that links sensuous experience to theoretical reflection.

‘Playing’ is different from, but just as important as, presentation of meaning and knowledge ‘a play’. A difference stands between theatre as communication and a drama created as an investigative and experiential practice not dependent on an external audience. A “third” space for sharing and communication is to be found in the more intimate and secure cultural community, the space that theories on ritual call “communion”. The “third” space has its own valuable contextual aesthetic, between everyday social life and the artistic public sphere. (Rasmussen, 2001, p. 42). This “third” space was an essential arena in the methodology of *The Pedagogy of Experience*.

The process of acquiring knowledge or learning in *The Pedagogy of Experience* is akin to what one today terms transformative learning.⁸ Learning that occurs on the basis of new strong experiences when the relationship to the existing reality transforms into another. This transformation or production of knowledge is based on a strong experience which has significance. The experience itself does not fulfil the conditions for transformative learning: the importance of the relationship to lived experience is decisive. In drama, the aesthetic experiences and the relationship brought into existence through the events are doubled. One experiences the creation of a new significance during the drama process – the production of knowledge. I venture to say that the transformative learning

⁷ Two concepts introduced in MA thesis (1999) “A Work of Hearts”, David Keir Wright.

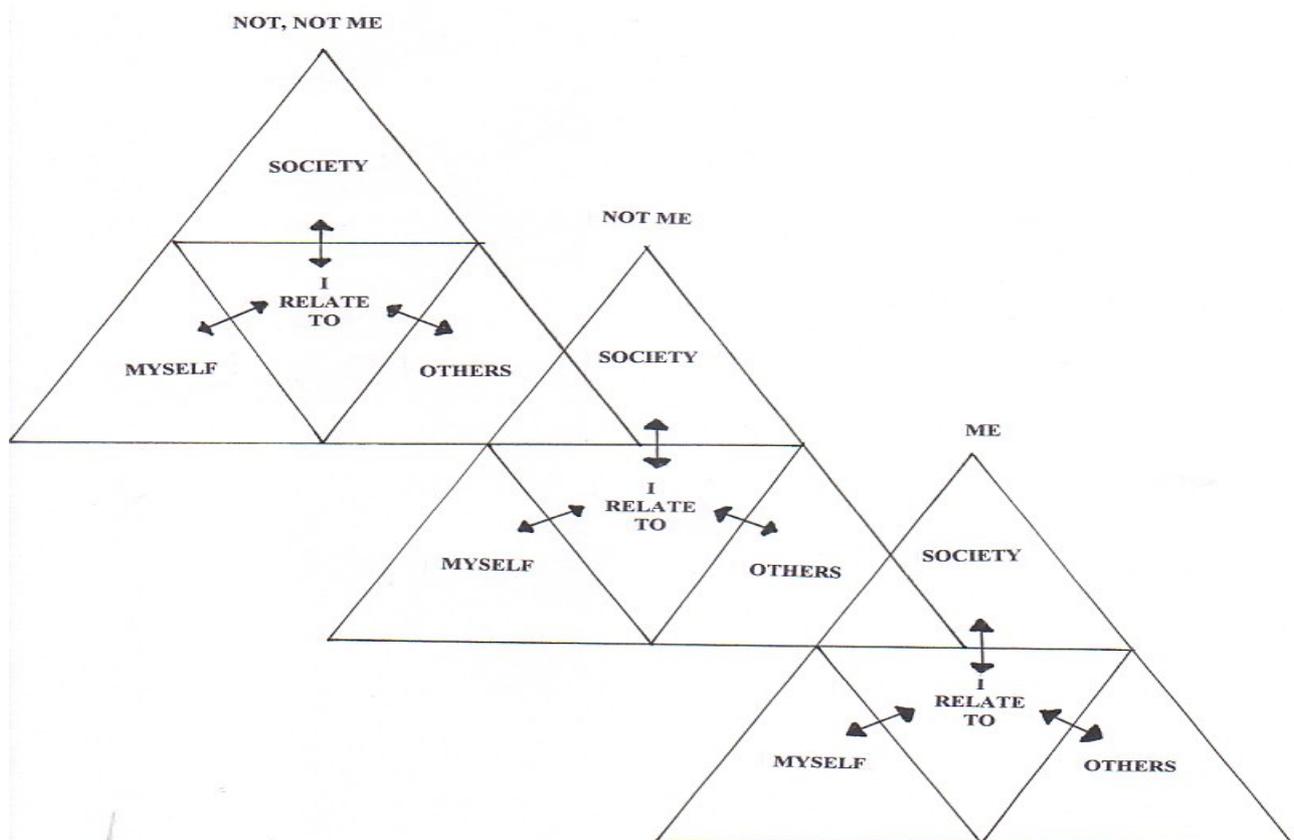
⁸ *Relations – Transformative Learning in Drama Education* - Pipsa Teerijoki. Article 9 i *Dramatic Cultures* Anna-Lena Østern (ed.) Report No 10/2004, Faculty of Education, Åbo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland..

in *the Pedagogy of Experience* is threefold through the relationship between the reflexion and reflection during

- the drama experience
- the experience when reflecting on the drama experience
- the experience of reflecting on earlier lived experience in relationship to the drama experience.

In my ongoing praxis since writing *A Work of Hearts* I have come to consider it more and more important today, in both an educational and a cultural context, that participants in the individual-centred drama methodology, use, research and discover knowledge about themselves, others, society and the world they relate to, in the dialectal and reciprocal relationship between me, not me and not, not me in both life and art-making processes in the potential space between reality and fiction. (figure 2)

Figure 2: Me – not me – not, not me and the Pedagogy of Experience.



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